

Committee on Resources

Subcommittee on Fisheries Conservation, Wildlife and Oceans

Statement

10 June, 1999

TESTIMONY OF ROBERT SCHOELKOPF, MARINE MAMMAL STRANDING CENTER, BRIGANTINE, NJ, on behalf of Bill H.R. 1934, Marine Mammal Rescue Assistance Act of 1999, to the Subcommittee on Fisheries Conservation, Wildlife and Oceans; Longworth House Office Building, Room 1334, Washington, D.C.

Ladies and Gentlemen: I would like to thank you for allowing me to give testimony on this important legislation. My name is Robert C. Schoelkopf and I am the founding Director of The Marine Mammal Stranding Center, a non-profit 501(c) (3) corporation organized 21 years ago for the purpose of rescue and rehabilitation of marine mammals and endangered sea turtles. We also collect tissue samples for scientific study, and report the cause of death for dead specimens, to the National Marine Fisheries Service.

Since our inception the Stranding Center has handled 1852 marine mammals and sea turtles. Those numbers break down to: 896 sea turtles, 575 cetaceans, 378 seals, 2 manatees, and one sea lion. Our goal of course is to insure the recovery of injured animals stranding on our beaches, but regardless, many more still wash up dead. Samples are sent to numerous research facilities throughout the United States who wish to study viruses and bacteria, stomach contents, aging, growth rates, reproduction, and bio hazard accumulation within the animal's system. Every animal that is fresh enough for necropsy is sent to the University of Pennsylvania Veterinary School for post mortem examination. Tissues are then sent to Armed Forces Institute of Pathology for further examination, and then added to the National Tissue Bank for future research needs.

Funding for our center is generated totally from private donations in the form of membership or corporate sponsorship. Much of our time is spent organizing fundraisers to keep our annual \$350,000 budget current. We estimate we have spent well over five million dollars since our organization was established in 1978.

The Marine Mammal Protection Act presently provides funding for unusual mortality events, however we have only had to use these funds once in our 21 years. In 1987 our organization recognized the beginning of a major die off of bottlenose dolphins along the East Coast of the United States. We were reimbursed \$10,000 to cover some of the costs incurred during that

event. Unfortunately most of the strandings that we handle are considered routine, and federal funding is not available at this time.

The Marine Mammal Rescue Assistance Act will make it possible for the many other stranding facilities throughout the United States that have similar if not greater expenses that we do, to continue their work. The National Marine Fisheries Service has acknowledged the need for stranding networks along the coast to be the first response to not only typical strandings but also for unusual episodes. Funding from this bill would give many centers the opportunity to plan their budget much further into the future. Just as strandings are unpredictable, the amount of funds necessary for each stranding are just as difficult to plan, if not impossible.

Thank you again for your time and I hope you'll look favorably on the passage of this bill.

Robert C. Schoelkopf, Director
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